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Letter dated 20 February 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Namibia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that the Government of the Republic of Namibia hosted, in Windhoek, a high-level meeting for the seventeenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development for the Africa region on 9 and 10 February 2009, on the theme "African Agriculture in the Twenty-first Century: Meeting the Challenges, Making a Sustainable Green Revolution".

The meeting, which was co-organized by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism of Namibia and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (Division for Sustainable Development) of the United Nations Secretariat, was attended by about 120 participants both from within and outside Africa.

The meeting concluded with the adoption of the Windhoek High-level Ministerial Declaration on "African Agriculture in the Twenty-first Century: Meeting the Challenges, Making a Sustainable Green Revolution" (see annex).

In this connection, we request you to kindly publish and circulate the present letter and its annex, as a document of the United Nations.

(*Signed*) Kaire M. **Mbuende**
Ambassador and Permanent Representative

* E/CN.17/2009/1.

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Annex

Windhoek High-level Ministerial Declaration on African Agriculture in the Twenty-first Century: Meeting the Challenges, Making a Sustainable Green Revolution

1. We, Ministers and Government representatives, having met at the High-level Meeting on "African Agriculture in the Twenty-first Century: Meeting the Challenges, Making a Sustainable Green Revolution", held in Windhoek on 9 and 10 February 2009, reaffirm our commitment to sustainable development in Africa and recognize the critical role of agriculture in the achievement of sustainable development in Africa.

2. We recognize with a sense of urgency the need to achieve the vision of Heads of State and Government of Africa. We are also aware that the vision provides strategic direction to plans and action programmes, including the New Partnership for Africa's Development,[a] which was endorsed by the African Union and is being implemented by regional bodies and national institutions.

3. We support the call for a uniquely African green revolution to help boost agricultural productivity, food production and national food security. We support all efforts to achieve a sustainable green revolution.

4. We recognize that an African green revolution does not depend only on improved seeds and fertilizer and that it must be built on a range of complementary investments, many of which will need to be undertaken by the public sector, in rural development — including rural roads, electricity, health and education.

5. We further recognize the need for an active engagement of the State in supporting agriculture, especially small-scale agriculture. The escalation and volatility in prices faced by farmers have highlighted the need for effective institutions to ensure greater price stability. We also emphasize the critical importance of Governments in providing rural infrastructure, in supporting agricultural research and development, and in creating an enabling policy environment that provides incentives to innovation and risk-taking by farmers.

6. We appreciate the important role of livestock in African agriculture and of mixed crop-livestock systems in providing income and food security and in reducing farmers' risk. We assign a high priority to improving the productivity and sustainability of such systems as well as other systems characteristic of agriculture in Africa.

7. We fully understand that agriculture depends on a variety of ecosystem services for its productivity, including those provided by forests, and that biological diversity in agricultural ecosystems can provide such benefits as resilience with respect to climate, pests and other threats and disturbances.

8. We are convinced that the challenges facing African agriculture need to be addressed with a sense of urgency. There is broad consensus on what the main challenges are and what is needed to confront them, as reflected in the outcomes of the Rome and Madrid conferences on food security. What is needed now is the strong political will of Governments to take the necessary actions and of the

[a] A/57/304, annex.

international community to support those actions by whatever means are appropriate. We have that will.

9. We recognize that we are meeting at a critical juncture in our efforts to address the challenges of achieving internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. We further recognize that we face multiple challenges in our efforts to achieve these goals, including those related to the financial crisis, the global food crisis and energy, as well as the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change. We are concerned about the negative impacts of these risks on sustained economic growth and sustainable development, particularly in Africa. We believe that these challenges require early and concerted global action.[b]

10. We express our concern regarding the global food crisis which poses a serious challenge to the fight against poverty and hunger, to the efforts of African countries to attain food security and to the goal of reducing by half the number of undernourished people by 2015, as well as the achievement of other internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.[c]

11. We recognize that agriculture plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of a growing global population and is inextricably linked to poverty eradication, especially in African countries where the majority of the population depend on agriculture for their livelihood. We reiterate that supporting integrated and sustainable agriculture and rural development is essential to achieving food security and food safety in Africa.[d]

12. We also recognize that African countries have taken a number of measures at the national, subregional and regional levels to boost agriculture and rural development, including policy responses aimed at reversing the decline in agriculture and boosting production to achieve food security.[e]

13. We further recognize that a sustainable green revolution in Africa is needed if hunger, poverty and environmental degradation trends are to be reversed. Agriculture in Africa has to be transformed through an enabling environment comprising of policy, institutions, infrastructure and investment in scientific research, technology development and dissemination. Success in agriculture in Africa further requires provision of the latest scientific knowledge and experience in applying techniques of sustainable land, soil and water management. We emphasize that the green revolution needs to be tailored to the specificities of the continent's highly diverse agro-ecological conditions, farming systems and sociocultural contexts.

14. We are mindful that African agriculture and rural economies need to be revitalized in ways that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.

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[b] As stated in the ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2008 of the Economic and Social Council (see A/63/3, sect. IV.F, para. 119), para. 1. The ministerial declaration will be issued in final form in *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-third Session, Supplement No. 3* (A/63/3/Rev.1).

[c] See the political declaration on Africa's development needs (General Assembly resolution 63/1 of 22 September 2008), para. 25.

[d] Ministerial declaration of the Council's 2008 high-level segment, para. 27.

[e] See regional statement on agriculture and rural development, land, drought and desertification, and Africa (E/CN.17/2008/12/Add.1), sect. I (Agriculture and rural development).

To this end, we recommit ourselves to accelerating progress towards the Maputo Declaration target of raising the share of national budgets devoted to agriculture and rural development to at least 10 per cent and appeal for international support for the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme under the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

15. We call for a concerted and collective response by African countries and the international community, working in partnership to support integrated and sustainable agriculture and rural development approaches, and stress the importance of food security and of strengthening the agricultural sector, as set out in, inter alia, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme. We call upon development partners, including the United Nations system, to increase their assistance to Africa, in particular to least developed countries and those that are most negatively affected by high food prices.[f]

16. We recognize that Africa has been severely affected by drought, desertification and land degradation, and loss of biodiversity. We further recognize that the key to agricultural revitalization and food security is better and sustainable land management, including reclaiming dry and degraded land so as to make it propitious for agriculture. This would contribute, inter alia, to offering new economic opportunities for enhanced rural development and improved prospects for sustainable livelihoods to affected rural populations, while also improving biodiversity conservation.[g]

17. We acknowledge that desertification, which poses serious threats to the achievement of sustainable development and to the eradication of poverty and hunger, is a global problem which requires a global response through concerted efforts among all Member States and concerned stakeholders.

18. We underline the potential of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa,[h] to contribute to addressing the challenge of achieving food security, particularly by protecting land from becoming degraded, we pledge our commitment to implementing the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (2008-2018),[i] and call on donors to enhance financial support for the Convention, including strategic objective 4, and we also call for substantial, additional resources for the land degradation focal area during the fifth replenishment period of the Global Environment Facility.

19. We acknowledge the importance of the export of agriculture products for Africa's economic growth, as agriculture plays a pivotal role in the continent's overall economy. We are concerned by the high dependence on a limited number of export commodities, weak technological capacities, inadequate legal and regulatory institutional frameworks and insufficient transport, storage and marketing infrastructure, and policy-induced constraints resulting from trade and macroeconomic policies that are biased against exports of agricultural products.[j]

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[f] See General Assembly resolution 63/1, para. 25.

[g] Based on E/CN.17/2008/12/Add.1, sect. III (Drought and desertification).

[h] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1954, No. 33480.

[i] A/C.2/63/7, annex.

[j] Based on the New Partnership for Africa's Development (A/57/304, annex).

20. We are concerned that Africa's share of international trade is only 2 per cent and is likely to further decrease as a result of the current global economic crisis. We underline the important role that trade plays in promoting economic growth. We stress the need to promote Africa's international trade, including through regional integration and greater integration into the global economy and fulfilment of the commitment to the achievement of a well-functioning, universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system which promotes sustainable development. We commit to redoubling our efforts towards the reinvigoration of the multilateral trade negotiations and to achieving a development-oriented outcome of the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization. We call for stronger national action and international support to build domestic, productive and competitive export supply capacities, as well as trade support, infrastructure and institutions in African countries.[k]

21. We urge developed countries to support agriculture development in Africa by ensuring greater access to their markets as well as to provide support to capacity-building of African producers to enable them to achieve compliance with relevant international standards.

22. We urge the international community to promote and facilitate access to the development, acquisition, transfer and diffusion of technologies and the corresponding know-how to African countries and call for increased technical and financial assistance to African countries for the purpose of strengthening their national innovation capacity, inter alia, through research and development, to increase agricultural production and improve competitiveness.

23. We are convinced that enhanced financial and technical support for crop and livestock research and development, including on varieties and methods adapted to climate change, is a high priority. We therefore urge the international financial institutions to increase significantly their support to investment in agriculture and rural development in Africa in order to ensure food security, increase incomes and eradicate poverty.

24. We undertake to further the process of African regional trade in order to promote the modernization of agriculture by opening up new markets and realizing scale economies in agricultural input production.

25. We are determined to achieve sustainability of African economies and their integration into the global market in order to reduce the continent's heavy dependence on the extraction, harvesting and export of primary commodities with minimal processing and value addition. We are committed to promoting economic diversification, including through expanded production of high-value agricultural products and the development of industries based on the further processing of and value addition to primary products. We encourage international investment, technology and transfer of know-how to further this process.

26. We note the growing global demand for biofuels which has opened up significant new opportunities and challenges for African food production. We intend to work to develop our biofuels sectors in ways that are consistent with our own food security and with principles of environmental sustainability and social equity.

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[k] Based on General Assembly resolution 63/1, para. 20.

27. We underscore the importance, particularly for small-scale farmers, of securing agricultural land rights so as to ensure that the poor benefit from the modernization of Africa's agriculture and from its growing integration into world markets. We shall continue to encourage the sustainable land management practices aimed at boosting agricultural productivity. We shall also encourage increased exchange of experiences and know-how both within and beyond the continent.

28. We recognize that women constitute a significant proportion of those engaged in subsistence farming in Africa. We are committed to the empowerment of women, including through more secure land tenure, and their full participation in decision-making in areas of agriculture, rural development and resource management.

29. We acknowledge with appreciation the valuable contribution made by major groups, academia and other experts in promoting agriculture in Africa and emphasize the importance of their continued role in promoting a sustainable green revolution in Africa.

30. We appreciate the participation and support of the United Nations system, in particular the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, international organizations and civil society in preparing for and contributing to this meeting.

31. Having deliberated carefully and critically on the challenges facing agriculture in Africa and on the way forward towards best addressing those challenges, we offer the following recommendations for consideration by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its seventeenth session:

(a) Governments and international donors should substantially increase financial support to agricultural and livestock research centres in Africa, which would encompass working to make them more effective and efficient not only in generating innovations but also in diffusing them to farmers;

(b) Governments should help small-scale farmers better manage the various risks they face, including price, weather, climate and natural disaster risks, by mitigating risk, assuming a share of the risk, and promoting the development of agricultural insurance markets;

(c) Governments and international institutions should work to rebuild agricultural extension services and reorient them, where appropriate, towards making greater use of farmer-to-farmer extension, including through field schools where farmers could be trained as extension workers, so as to combine their traditional knowledge with contemporary science and technology;

(d) Governments should work with development partners to mobilize investments in needed infrastructure for agriculture and rural development, including irrigation, roads, electricity and communications technologies;

(e) Agricultural research institutions should work closely with farmers in developing and applying new technologies, in a process of co-innovation, and should also endeavour to learn from farmers so as to enhance their own research efforts;

(f) Governments may wish to provide subsidized inputs to small-scale farmers as a way of promoting agricultural production and enhanced food security; in this regard, timely access to inputs and credit is critical;

(g) Government policies for agriculture need to encourage strong backward and forward linkages through the development and strengthening of the entire agricultural supply chain, ranging from input, equipment and credit suppliers to marketing institutions;

(h) Pre- and post-harvest technologies should be diffused more widely to enable farmers to realize greater value from their crops;

(i) Governments should work to ensure that credit and other financial facilities are more readily available to small-scale farmers, including through loan subsidies and guarantees;

(j) Governments should encourage the formation of agricultural cooperatives to enhance farmers' earning power and of farmers' associations to encourage knowledge-sharing and technology diffusion;

(k) The empowerment of women farmers needs to be enhanced by Governments, including through secure land tenure, in recognition of the fact that they constitute a majority of agricultural producers and make decisions that affect investment and productivity;

(l) Governments, in cooperation with the research community and with support from the international donor community, should undertake rigorous comparative assessments of alternative agricultural models and cropping systems in the major agro-ecological zones of Africa;

(m) Governments should coordinate agricultural policies across natural resource sectors, for example, by developing mutually compatible policies on forests and agriculture;

(n) Governments should use the frameworks and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to assess and monitor progress made in reclaiming degraded and drylands;

(o) Governments should mainstream the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification into their national and regional policy platforms with a view to improving the livelihoods of affected populations and improving affected ecosystems;

(p) Governments should implement National Action Plans (under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification) and National Adaptation Programmes of Action (under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change[1]) in a synergistic fashion for the purpose of achieving adaptation to climate change;

(q) Governments should monitor the implementation of the resolutions of the Commission on Sustainable Development that are relevant to agriculture in the African Peer Review Mechanism and consider the establishment of a focused Regional Inter-ministerial Committee led by Ministers of Agriculture;

(r) North-South and South-South cooperation should be further enhanced in such areas as biofuels, drylands agriculture and combating desertification;

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[1] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1771, No. 30822.

(s) International financial institutions and other funding agencies should put in place, as needed, streamlined procedures for timely disbursal of funds for purchases of food and agricultural inputs.

32. We express our deep appreciation and gratitude to the Government of Namibia for hosting this important meeting.

33. We hereby affirm our wish that the present declaration be presented by the Minister of Environment and Tourism of Namibia, as Co-Chair of this Meeting, to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its seventeenth session.